



ONE LOVE AND TWO LIVES

I

*On the first page are two pictures look at them and you'll see
One's a young girl, one's a young boy waiting there to meet
Turn the page they're together turn again a groom and bride
The pictures tell the story of one love and two lives*

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That's the first verse of a song called One Love and Two Lives, written for and about my parents. It was recorded and became part of the Let Love Go Forward album named for a song I wrote for Pat's and my wedding. While I've tried to adhere to Willie Nelson's maxim "tell the truth and make it rhyme" in all my songwriting a subtle and unconscious difference remained well into the 90's in mindset and heart-set between the songs I wrote for family, friends, and myself and those I wrote for a changing marketplace.

Over the years one of the biggest changes in Nashville is the way songs are written. When I first visited in the mid-70's songwriters tended to work alone. Twenty years later most Nashville songwriters were co-writing, working with other songwriters. In 1996 I joined the Nashville Songwriters Association and began attending Seattle area meetings as a way to get to know other writers. I also started writing with some old friends, Gary Drager, who I've written with off and on through the years, and Cliff and Lana Rae Lenz. With Drager I was writing mostly music and the Lenz's mostly words. Collaborating, it can be fun. As that line between "writing for sale" and "writing for self" continued to blur and finally disappear it's become clear that songwriting for me remains primarily a solitary endeavor.

In April of 96 The Brothers Four did a three week concert tour of Japan. A year earlier in what was either a chance encounter or an extremely well choreographed reunion in a bar in Osaka the group ran into the head of Japan's premier promotion company and reestablished a relationship that had run its course a few years earlier. It's a connection that couldn't have been rekindled by a simple phone call. It's part of the mystery of doing business in Japan.

That May thanks to our friend, Dan McConnell, and the Chinese Ministry of Culture The Brothers Four spent two weeks traveling and singing in Mainland China. While hoped for follow up tours didn't happen it was an amazing experience. We were told at that time Chinese audiences learned about western music listening to radio stations broadcasting from Hong Kong and Taiwan. Those station might play a Michael Jackson record followed by the Beatles and then play one of our songs without a lot of explanation in between. To make things even better for us they couldn't really tell how old we were so on some level it was as if for those days in China we were young again and the music somehow new again. Pat came on that tour and was there to document the fact that some young female fans actually came up and asked us to sign the t-shirts they were wearing. We happily obliged.

Let love go forward from this time and place...



Later in the summer Pat and I repainted the inside of the house with help from one of my high school singing partners. We moved the TV downstairs the piano upstairs bought a new couch. In September she and I traveled to Ireland where I'd dreamed of going for years and to Scotland where Pat's dad's family came from. In November there was a 60th birthday party in the mountains for a friend with lots of celebrating and singing. Then suddenly it was December and for the first time in some time my two brothers and I were together with our parents for Christmas. It's only looking back that I realize what an important time it was to be together.

II

Page after page the pictures show a growing family

One, two, three the kids arrive and make the scenes complete

Sometimes in living color sometimes in black and white

The pictures tell the story of one love and two lives

During the holidays my mom talked about wanting The Brothers Four and/or me to do a concert in Spokane. She said she would be happy to help with the promotion. In early January she called to say there were two weekend dates available in the coming year at a 750 seat downtown theater known as The Met. There was a Friday night in September as well as Saturday, March 29th. We figured that March date might have been available because it was Easter weekend. In Spokane that's a time when people are often home with their families. I'd previously booked Saturday, March 22nd for a personal concert in Seattle as a way of celebrating my 50th birthday. I was not going to let 50 sneak up like 40 did. We decided to take the March date with my mom promoting a Brothers Four concert with me as an opening act. At that moment it all seemed so easy. I figured in the next two months I would get in great shape. Lose a bunch of weight. All these tickets would get sold. I would write these new songs and introduce them at two concerts one of which would be a triumphant return to my hometown.

Huh. Easy indeed.

The day before he was murdered President Kennedy was in Houston talking about sending a man to the moon. He mentioned an Irish writer, Frank O'Connor, who as a boy when he came to an orchard wall that appeared too high to climb, would toss his cap over that wall leaving no choice but to climb it if he wanted his cap back. The President ended his speech saying the nation has tossed its cap over the wall of space...we have no choice but to follow...whatever the difficulties...we will climb this wall...and shall then explore the wonders on the other side.

Let love go forward from this time and place...



While losing a few pounds, writing a few songs, promoting and preparing to perform a few concerts is not going to the moon by early February those things together felt like a mighty high wall. I particularly remember one day. My mom called to say she'd sold about a hundred tickets and didn't think she could sell one more. I'd gained a few pounds the previous week. The new songs were nowhere to be found. That morning I sprained my ankle playing squash. I limped into the house plopped on a chair and proceeded to throw myself a pity party of one. While the worms I was serving were as imaginary as the tea often served at a child's tea party they managed to leave a bitter taste in my mouth. The party was just reaching a crescendo when Pat came through the door saw me in my dejected state and simply couldn't stop laughing. In retrospect I was pathetic and it was hilarious but I definitely didn't see the humor at that moment.

Then somehow I got out of that chair and eventually got back to work. The ankle healed. A few pounds came off. More tickets got sold. Songs got written. One of them is the song for this campfire, One Love and Two Lives. The song from the last campfire, On a New Day is another one. There was also 1968 and When I Was Young and This Old Guitar Was New, songs that have stood the test of time.

Suddenly it was concert time.

There's a fellow, Gerhardt, from Austria who like my mom wanted The Brothers Four to perform in his hometown. He promoted the show and made it happen. Before we went on stage that night he gave us the nicest introduction we've ever gotten. Gerhardt talked about going to see one of the astronauts who walked on the moon who said everything about the going to the moon was great except that moment after the lunar module reunited with the command module and it was time to go home. It was that moment the astronaut realized that he would never have an experience like that again. At that point Gerhardt stopped and said, "Tonight with the help of The Brothers Four I am going to the moon."

Looking back I realize for two Saturdays in March of 1997 so did I.

III

*Through all the change of fashion lengths of skirts and lengths of hair
Through every change of season their love is always there
Through holidays and birthdays through vacations through the years
In portraits and blurred snapshots their love is always clear*

All these years later it is as if the concert in Seattle on March 22nd and the one in Spokane a week later were one big show with a weeklong intermission in between. Taken together the shows were a combination of homecomings that represented where I had come from, where I was, and where I was going.

Let love go forward from this time and place...



The Seattle concert was at the auditorium of the Museum of History and Industry near the University of Washington where I'd gone to college. People found out about it through word of mouth and donated what they thought it was worth as they came through the door. The enthusiastic audience filled about three quarters of the hall.

There's a saying: the older we get the better we were. It's an apt expression for example when old folks sit around and recall their high school or college days. For the most part we tend to remember the lighter brighter moments and let the angst and anguish fade. There's a good share of that on a couple of levels when I think back to that Saturday night in 1997 the only time when the groups I sang with in high school, college, and professionally appeared together on a single stage. I remember that night with nothing but fondness and yet at the time I was so nervous on so many levels that I had trouble really appreciating it.

The Castaways was the name of our group in high school. We wore striped shirts like The Kingston Trio. The most important thing was not to sound like ourselves but like the records we were trying to imitate which we did pretty well. We were in demand and made some money. And now thirty-five years later we're reliving the dream.

The four of us in the college group were in the same fraternity The Brothers Four came out of a few years earlier, Phi Gamma Delta. We called ourselves The Mourning Ryde and performed in sweaters we had been awarded for participating in intercollegiate athletics as freshmen. We were four clean-cut guys with a kind of Glee Club sound whose highlight was serenading sororities until our big moment on national TV when we won a round of Your All-American College Show finally losing to someone playing drums and singing like an angel named Karen Carpenter. The four of us got together for dinner a few weeks before the concert and sat around the dining room table singing every song we knew. Nothing awakens memories like music.

John Paine represented The Brothers Four at that concert. We sang Green Fields together somehow stumbling over the words. Then McCoy and I performed. Singing Dear Partner continuing to add meaning as we made our way down the road. Then standing up by myself singing The Winners and the Losers before bringing everyone back on stage to sing Let Love Go Forward. When the music stopped everyone went upstairs to a banquet room in the museum where we ate cake and celebrated.

The next week I was in Spokane on Thursday night for a Friday morning radio show promoting Saturday's concert. I stopped by the theater and was told someone just called and bought the last of the tickets. My mom had filled one of the windows outside the theater with posters, pictures, album covers, and my first guitar. I stood on the corner looking in that window and then up at the marquee that had both The Brothers Four and my name on it.

The next night for the only time in my career I was the opening act as well as one of the headliners. McCoy joined me for four of the dozen songs I performed in the opening half. Five of the songs I had written that winter. It was a long way from a pity party of a few months earlier.

Let love go forward from this time and place...



If the previous week's concert showed how I got to where I was this show embodied where I was as well as where I was going. It was at this concert on this stage at a sold out performance in my hometown where three roads, solo artist, with McCoy, and as a member of The Brothers Four, converged and helped set the stage for all that what was to come.

When the show ended my mom, hostess as well as promoter, invited everyone to join her in the lobby for champagne and strawberries. An intimate party for 750.

IV

On the last page is one picture of a white haired man and wife

Who found each other years ago and married then for life

The years have been exposed to the unblinking camera's eye

The pictures tell the story of one love and two lives

One thing that's stayed with me about that Easter Weekend was how much energy hung in the air literally and figuratively. On Friday a friend of mine who had come from the East coast for the concert suffered an alcoholic seizure. There was a 911 call. A trip to the emergency room. He was embarrassed and in denial. I remember the tension in the air when my mom took a few of us aside on Saturday morning and told us we were simply going to love him.

There were all the emotions of doing a concert in my hometown. That I would be a solo artist as well as a member of The Brothers Four added to the excitement and the anxiety. That McCoy was part of it created more energy. That we happened to be celebrating between Good Friday and Easter Sunday somehow made it more than just another Saturday night. The packed house in the theater seemed to be aware of all of that. The energy kept growing throughout the day and then the performance.

The next morning, Easter Sunday, Coy, Connie, Pat and I joined my parents at their church that had once been a synagogue. While my dad was content to enter quietly through the side door, my mom walked us through the front door, happily greeting and being greeted by a host of people who had been there for the previous night's celebration.

The Hailey Bopp comet had been a fascinating part of the night sky for weeks. My parents' friend and minister, Don Gilmore, talked about it that morning at church. He explained how a few days earlier members of the Heaven's Gate cult led by someone named Marshall Applewhite had participated in a mass suicide with expectations they would reunite in a UFO that was following behind the comet. You could feel the energy shift when Don paused, looked up at the congregation, and began explaining how years earlier he and Marshall Applewhite had been friends. The unimaginable suddenly personal.

Later that afternoon after Easter brunch at my folks' house, Pat, my friend

Let love go forward from this time and place...



from the East Coast, and I drove back to Seattle. There were heavy winds that night and a thunder snowstorm. We lost power in the house, a maple tree in the backyard broke loudly in half, my friend woke up screaming in the night. We awakened the next morning the last day of March to 6 inches of snow on the ground.

Maybe if all that was about to happen hadn't happened the energy that filled the air to overflowing those first nights and days of spring might simply have been an after thought instead of a harbinger of what was to become a long season of the heart. Maybe if all that was about to happen hadn't happened I wouldn't have returned so often to that moment in church that Easter Sunday when Don Gilmore read from Loren Eiseley and I saw my normally stoic father's eyes fill with tears. Think of yourself as the chicken hawk, Don implored as he began to read.

He was born to it and made no outcry now resting in my hand hopelessly but peering toward me with a fierce, almost indifferent glance. Something out of the high air passed from him to me stirring forth excitement. I put the sparrow hawk in a box but next morning I got him out. He lay limp in my grasp. I saw him look away beyond me into a sky so full of light that I could not follow his gaze. I reached over and laid the hawk on the grass. He lay there for a long minute, his eyes still fixed on the blue vault above him. It must have been that he was so far away that he never felt the release of my hand. He never even stood. In the next second after that long instant he was gone. Like a flicker of light he had vanished from my sight. He was gone straight into that towering emptiness of light and crystal that my eyes could scarcely bear to penetrate. For another long moment there was silence. Then from up somewhere a cry came ringing down. I was young then and had seen little of the world, but when I heard that cry my heart turned over. It was not the cry of the hawk that I had captured. Straight out of the sun's eye where she had been soaring restlessly above us for untold hours hurdled his mate. I saw them both now. He was rising to meet her and from far up ringing from peak to peak of the summits over us came a cry of such unutterable ecstatic joy that it sounds down across the years and tingles among the cups of my quiet breakfast table.

There are moments that leave us holding our breath and moments that take our breath away. There are moments when we can finally let go the breath we're holding. Looking back that weekend that moment would turn out to be all those things.

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